



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SIX DEFENDANTS CHARGED WITH HOLDING 32 ALIENS HOSTAGE

PHOENIX, ARIZONA -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on November 25, 2003, a federal grand jury at Phoenix, Arizona, returned a nine count indictment against NICASIO FRANCO-ARAGON (DOB 10/11/79), JOSE PLAZA-RODRIGUEZ (DOB 3/19/61), JOEL NAJERA-ESCOBAR (DOB 5/15/82), VICTORINO LOPEZ-ORONIA (DOB 3/12/68), JOSE MANUEL RODRIGUEZ-BARRON (DOB 5/8/83), and MARTA VASQUEZ-REYES (DOB 1/13/83), all of whom are being detained by the United States Marshals Service.

The indictment alleges that all six defendants were members of a conspiracy, beginning on an unknown date in October 2003 continuing until October 31, 2003, which involved holding at least 32 undocumented aliens at a residence located at 6541 N. 67th Avenue, Apartment 112, Glendale, AZ. The aliens were held at gunpoint, forced to provide phone numbers of contacts who would pay the smuggling fee and, in some cases, were assaulted.

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The federal indictment charges all six defendants with violating Title 18, United States Code, Section 1203 (Conspiracy to Take Hostages and Hostage Taking), Title 8, United States Code, Sections 1324(a)(1)(A)(iii) and (a)(1)(A)(v)(I) (Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens) and Title 8, United States Code, Sections 1324(a)(1)(A)(iii) and (a)(1)(B)(i) (Harboring Illegal Aliens for Commercial Advantage or Private Financial Gain).

A conviction for Conspiracy to Take Hostages and Hostage taking carries a maximum penalty of life, a \$250,000 fine or both. A conviction for Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens and Harboring Illegal Aliens for Commercial Advantage or Private Financial Gain carries a maximum penalty of 10 years, a \$250,000 fine or both.

An indictment is simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The prosecution is being handled by Lisa Jennis Settel, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-03-1284

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